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## THE WOMAN'S INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENT.

BY THE RIGHT HONORABLE THE COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN.

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THE great International Congress to which the world of women workers has been looking forward for so long, has come and gone, and what has it left behind it? That is the question which those who have been behind the scenes are asking themselves, as they see the curtain fall.

That the Congress has been a success is indisputable and is testified to from most unexpected quarters. The fact that meetings on the most varied subjects, going on in five sections simultaneously for a week, were always crowded by persons who had thought it worth while to pay for their seats, is sufficient evidence in itself. A list of over two thousand five hundred members of the Congress, a financial balance on the right side, and a collection of valuable papers presented by some four hundred speakers from different parts of the world, and experts on their own subjects, these are the visible results we have left to us.

Has the chief use of the Congress been, then, to mark the immense advance in the interest in women's work shown by women themselves, to demonstrate their increased ability to organize, and to produce a permanent record of the progress made along the several lines of thought and activity dealt with?

These are fragments of the truth, but only fragments; and in-  
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deed, at the present moment, we are not in a position to judge the matter we are considering in its right perspective, for we are too near it.

But of one thing we are sure, and that is, that a vision has been vouchsafed to us during the course of these gatherings, revealing to us something of what *may* be, if the workers for the weal of the world, men and women alike, will enter into a compact to help one another, to learn from one another and to stand by one another. There are some who lament that a more practical turn could not have been given to the Congress by the passing of resolutions focussing the feeling of each meeting. These do not see that, in their desire for immediate progress in the sphere of their own special efforts, they might well imperil all the wonderful possibilities which are latent in a movement which will bring the world's workers into real relations with one another, on the understanding that, however different their views, they are each giving their best to the world according to their own light.

The chief aim of the International Council which convened this Congress is to promote greater unity of thought, sympathy and purpose, amongst women workers of different nations; and therefore its Constitution does not permit it to identify itself with any movement of a controversial nature, but directs it to form a centre, a common meeting place for all who seek to work for the good of their kind. The mere contact thus brought about we look upon as of the highest value, and how often have we not had evidence of this throughout this Congress? "I have just been listening to ———'s paper; it *was* a surprise to me. I never thought *she* looked upon the matter in that light. I never knew the facts of the case were of *that* nature." Such were the remarks frequently made by workers whose faces showed that a new thought had been received, and that they meant to think it out.

Do not influences of this character brought to bear on one being who is in touch with the spirit of another, mean much more in the long run to the world's progress than a definite stimulus given to a few causes at the expense of others upheld by supporters who feel henceforth that they are not wanted, and therefore had better withdraw from our Conferences?

Besides, public opinion has an instinct for being right, and when it has an opportunity of hearing rival views and theories,

impartially stated on both sides, the truest and the best are generally strengthened. The causes, therefore, based on justice and right are bound to win, and need never fear a fair opportunity being given to their opponents to state their views.

Another regret has been expressed, that speakers have for the most part been tied down to preparing papers of definite and circumscribed length, instead of being allowed to address their audiences without written notes. Doubtless this has tended to make it difficult for the speakers to make their voices carry far enough in many cases, because of the tendency to let the head drop when reading, but, on the other hand, the Congress has profited immensely by the carefully arranged information packed into the papers, which makes them of permanent value. As far as we can at present judge, the level of the papers was very high, and betokened a great amount of trouble which would probably never have been expended on spoken addresses. But of this the public can judge when we publish our volumes of transactions in the autumn.

Already, we hear of action being taken in various directions as an outcome of the exchange of views made at this meeting or at that.

I am not alluding to the special subject of International Arbitration, which, at the largest meeting in favor of this movement ever held in London, the International Council pledged itself to support, by furthering the cause of Peace through Arbitration by every means in its power.

I am rather speaking of such subjects as, for instance, Agriculture as a field for women, which was discussed at a most interesting and stimulating meeting, which, we understand, is to lead presently to a Conference on Agriculture another year. Women, as a rule, have neglected their responsibilities in this regard, and have not realized how necessary is a scientific knowledge of the principles underlying successful agriculture; and it is time for them to wake up and find out how much they can do if they have practical training.

But, at this moment, the first outcome of the Congress appears likely to be the consideration of the problem of the Housing of Educated Working Women in great cities, brought forward by Mr. Gilbert Parker at a Conference convened by the Council itself. Mr. Gilbert Parker has taken infinite pains to collect the

facts of the case, as far as they exist in London, and, as there was no time for discussion, it was decided that a further independent meeting should be called to deal with the matter for London, and a resolution was also passed urging National Councils generally to make this a subject of special inquiry.

Mr. Parker brought a formidable indictment against the present condition of affairs. He takes as his client the educated woman earning from £50 to £140 by typewriting, secretarial work, research work for authors, etc., and eloquently depicts the sordidness of their life and the impossible conditions under which they labor. He pictured the girl brought up in a sheltered and refined home, thrown on the world and counting herself lucky in having found a position where she can earn from twenty to thirty shillings a week.

He gives three typical cases to indicate the class of workers for whom he pleads.

(1.) "Miss ——," a clergyman's daughter, assists a man who gives lectures to a large number of pupils, makes appointments, keeps the books, does all shorthand and typewriting, conducts his correspondence, etc. She tried various cheap boarding houses; but, finding none where cleanliness could be had at the figure she could afford to pay, now lives in a room in the South-western district, for which she pays ten shillings out of her weekly twenty-five. Breakfast and dinner cost her seven shillings and seven pence a week, 'bus fares sixpence a day, which brings her outlay up to twenty-one shillings; and out of the remainder she has to find a midday meal, washing, clothes, a fire on winter evenings, for which she is charged half a crown a week, and numberless small items in the way of boot cleaning, hot water fetching, etc.

(2.) "Miss J——," the daughter of a professional man who lost his money, having had a better literary education than usual, does research work at the British Museum for an author who pays her twenty-eight shillings a week. After a long day in that heavy atmosphere, poring over old French and German historical works, she makes the three-quarters-of-an-hour journey back to a tiny bedroom in Chelsea, where two people can scarce pass each other; and, after a hasty meal, taken off a tray on the bed, she spends the evening in translating and typewriting the results of the day's labor. For this room eight shillings and sixpence is

charged, breakfast and dinner being supplied at sixpence and eightpence. Another daily expense for a bath brings the week's bill up to one pound and twopence; coals and the mysterious item, "kitchen firing," are eighteen pence, light is sixpence, shoe-brushing sixpence; and, after a weekly three shillings for 'bus fares, she is left with exactly two shillings and fourpence out of which to pay for her lunch and tea, washing, dress, newspapers, stamps, and recreation of any sort.

(3.) "Miss R——," the possessor of thirty shillings a week, is the daughter of a distinguished Admiral, whose sudden death left his family practically penniless. After she had learned typewriting, friends ultimately found a post for her with a well known charitable organization, where most of the routine of the office falls to her. She tried in vain for admission at the best homes for women she could hear of, but there was no single vacancy, and there were long lists of names waiting their turn. Being comparatively new to the struggle of life, and with her store of vitality as yet undiminished, she at last boldly plunged with a friend, and took a small unfurnished flat in a central part of London, where she has to pay half of the sixty pounds rent out of her eighty pounds a year; but then, as she says, once inside you can sit down and starve comfortably, and you can call your soul your own; which makes up for the sparseness of furniture, and for having to scrub the floors and do all the work yourself, to save a charwoman.

No wonder that one of these poor girls writes:

"What is it like—the working day of the woman who gets twenty-five shillings a week? Well, from the time she gets up in the morning, to snatch a hasty breakfast from a tray in her bedroom, ere rushing off to catch the train or 'bus covering the miles between her and her work, she has to endure a long day's unceasing toil under strain, often at uninteresting and mechanical work, in close air and unhealthy surroundings. Lucky if not expected to stay and overtake any extra arrears, she does the homeward journey over again at six o'clock, and returns fagged, headachy, and depressed to the 7 by 9 room where she has to stand up to let anyone pass. In addition to the physical and mental degradation that poverty brings, she has the galling sense of giving her best, and the fruits of an expensive schooling, for a pittance which is about half what is paid a junior clerk, of no education beyond the three R's. She knows, too, that the quality of her work hasn't a chance beside the fact that she is a woman, and women's labor is cheap, and if she doesn't take it, a hundred others will step into her shoes. The present monotony of her life leaves her nothing to look forward to, and no hope, through frugality, of saving

out of a bare living wage. She has the knowledge, too, that each year will make it the harder for her to continue in keen competition with the younger, better-trained women, owing to the demoralization of her mind from sordid and meagre surroundings, scanty and badly cooked food, and an utter absence of recreation."

Mr. Parker concludes his paper by sketching out a plan that might be tried to meet the desperate need revealed, which, by instituting residential furnished mansions with accommodations for, say, 400 ladies in single bedrooms, at a rate of five or six shillings a week for lodging, and ten shillings for board and other expenses, might at the same time be made a financial success.

I need not go into further details here, as this scheme will soon be ventilated at a conference where those personally interested and those who have been carrying on kindred work, will meet to discuss Mr. Parker's scheme and to come to some decision as to what practical steps can be adopted at once. The eagerness with which the idea is welcomed by some of the girls themselves, as evidenced in private letters, is very touching; it would seem as if the mere suggestion of such a possibility opens up to them an Elysium.

Several of the foreign delegates present manifested great interest in the subject, and it is hoped that these will institute an inquiry on the conditions of educated working women in other large cities on the Continent and in America.

Here, at any rate, is a definite outcome, which can be taken as an illustration of how direct work of a practical nature can be initiated by the Council.

That this action should have been suggested by a man is in itself typical of the spirit of the Congress. We have sought to emphasize by every means in our power that we welcomed all to our platforms who were interested in women's work, and that we considered that women's work could only reach its highest development when done in co-operation with men, and regarding the home as the centre to work from.

It must be admitted that the meetings of the Congress have occupied the public eye rather at the expense of the International Council of Women, which all the while was sitting in business session striving to strengthen and develop and adapt to various circumstances the links that united the National Councils who have federated with us.

In some quarters it has been insinuated that our delegates

were self-elected, and could not be held to be representatives of the divers countries from which they came. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our delegates from the United States, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Great Britain and Ireland, New South Wales, Denmark, Holland, New Zealand, and Tasmania, were all the regularly elected choice of the federation of Societies and Local Councils and Unions which in each country go to form a National Council, and thus can claim to be the representatives of the women workers of that country, by which term we mean the women engaged in philanthropy, education, professional, industrial or other public work. Our speakers were, for the most part, recommended by the same Councils, as possessing special knowledge in one department or another.

In countries where no Councils existed, such as France, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, Russia, Austria, Norway, Victoria, South Australia, West Australia, Queensland, Cape Colony, the Argentine Republic, Committees formed on the same basis from members of several Societies made lists of speakers and recommended to us ladies who could act as Honorary Vice-Presidents. Our charming little Chinese representative, Madame Shen, whose keen, interested face was a feature at many of our meetings, and who begged us to correct our erroneous ideas about Chinese women being nonentities, was officially appointed from China through the Chinese Ambassador in England.

The one great regret felt by many of us when looking back, has been the lack of opportunity for making more personal acquaintance with our many visitors. London is so big and our guests were scattered in so many directions, the meetings were so numerous and so varied, and the private hospitality and the public recognition shown to us has been so generous, that the time at our disposal for seeing one another at leisure has proved far too scanty.

Nevertheless, the remembrance of the official reception held amidst the palatial surroundings of Stafford House, by the kindness of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland, of the evening party at Lady Battersea's, where our visitors had the opportunity of meeting so many English notabilities, of the historic associations of Fulham Palace, where the Bishop of London and Mrs. Creighton made the whole Congress feel at home, and, lastly, of the magnificence of the final reception provided at beautiful Gun-



nersbury Park by Lord and Lady Rothschild and Mr. and Mrs. Leopold Rothschild, will be held in grateful memory, and will be associated with the beginning of many friendships which will mean much, not only to those who have formed them, but to the world which will profit by the new inspiration that will flow from them.

The time has come when we should render thanks to the many to whom they are due, but we are bewildered by our indebtedness. Shall we begin by telling our one hundred and fifty young lady stewards of our gratitude for their laborious efforts on our behalf at all our meetings, or with the hostesses who have received our visitors as guests in their own private homes during our Congress, or shall we record our obligations to the Press and to the Pulpit for their serious consideration of our work? We know not where to commence and where to end, and we relinquish the task.

Three scenes, however, stand out which cannot be omitted from any retrospect of the Congress, however brief. The first was the opening gathering in the great Hall of the Church House, where representative women from all the continents of the world mustered for the roll-call, and presented their greeting with so suggestive and so strong an individuality in each case that, from that moment, the reality and the internationality of our Congress could no more be doubted. The next was the stately special service at Westminster Abbey, arranged by the kindness of the English Council, where, amongst all the memories of the heroes of the past, the Bishop of Southampton spoke words of encouragement to the women workers for the future. And last, but not least, there was the gracious reception given to the Foreign, American, and Colonial delegates by the Queen of England at Windsor.

It was a moving sight to see the aged sovereign, whose sixty years reign has done more for women than the centuries which preceded it, and whose name is loved and venerated in all the countries of the world, both as the ideal Queen and the ideal woman, slowly moving in her carriage across the quadrangle of the old Castle, past the long rows of women, who, in all parts of the earth, are trying to leave the world better than they found it. There was our new President, Mrs. May Wright Sewall; there was the Queen's contemporary, Miss Susan B. Anthony, who has

borne herself throughout the Congress as if she were the youngest and keenest of us all; there were the dusky Indian women in their bright Oriental array, one of them carrying a sweet faced baby whom the Queen specially noticed; there were the delegates from far off Australia; there also was our Vice-President from France, Madame Bogelot, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, who, with bright, vivacious Madame Féresse Deraismes, again shows an example of activity and versatility not easily rivalled by the younger women. Representatives from Germany, Russia, Austria, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Holland, Denmark, they were all there, together with Americans and Canadians; and to all the Queen gave that gracious bow and smile which bound their hearts to her forever as they lifted their voices in one sincere invocation of "God Save the Queen." That person would be strangely constituted who could look on that scene untouched, and certain it is that the memory of it will be cherished in many far away homes. As the Queen's guests poured into the banquetting chamber to partake of the refreshments so thoughtfully provided after the heat of the day there was a glow on every face, there was a ring of enthusiasm in every voice, which betokened much more than a passing emotion, and which showed how completely this gracious act of the Queen had crowned the success of our Congress gathering, and how potent it would be for good.

ISHBEL ABERDEEN.